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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire containing all 78 items from the three forms of Robert F. Bales' Interpersonal Rating Forms (IRF) was administered to 266 college students to test the reliability and validity of the IRF. The questions asked for self-perceptions about one's roles and behaviors in task groups. The results indicated that the scales are neither reliable nor valid. (Possible explanations for the poor performance by the IRF scales and suggestions for their revision are offered.) (RL)

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AN INVESTIGATION OF BALES' INTERPERSONAL RATING FORMS

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AN INVESTIGATION OF BALES' INTERPERSONAL RATING FORMS

Perhaps the most influential researcher in the field of small group communication is Robert F. Bales. His category scheme for classifying behaviors in groups, called Interaction Process Analysis (IPA), is the most widely used system for small group research.[1]

Not as well publicized, but more important to group theory, is Bales' spatial model of group structure. This model is the rationale for the IPA category system. The model also identifies various group configurations and networks by distributing the group members within a three-dimensional group space.

Based on a dissertation by Couch,[2] Bales suggested that behaviors in groups could be categorized in terms of three primary dimensions. Bales has labeled the three dimensions up-down, positive-negative, and forward-backward. The up-down dimension is concerned with ascendant-submissive behaviors. It deals with perceptions of the group members' power and dominance. Placed in the "up" direction are group members who seem active, talkative, assertive, powerful, and who command respect. Placed in the "down" direction are group members who seem passive, submissive, quiet, nonassertive, powerless and self-effacing. The positive-negative dimension is concerned with affiliation and attraction. Members located in the "positive' part of the group space seem friendly, congenial, sociable and informal. Members located in the "negative" part of the group space seem unfriendly, disagreeable, unsocial, formal and distant. The forward-backward dimension is concerned with a group member's task orientation. In the "forward" direction are members who seem work-oriented

and value-controlled, while the "backward" direction describes members who are socially-oriented, emotionally expressive, and counteractive to value control.

As the group members can be classified in one of three positions (+, 0, -) on each of the three major dimensions, a person can be categorized into one of twenty-seven different group participation roles (see Figure 1). Once categorized, useful predictions can be made about the members' place in the interaction network, the kinds of ideas they are likely to express, the members with whom they are likely to form coalitions, those with whom they are likely to conflict, and their probable effect on the group's goal attainment and satisfaction.

(Figure 1 about here)

There are two major ways that group members can be categorized into the three-dimensional group space: (1) analyzing substantial portions of the group's actual behaviors, or (2) employing paper-and-pencil scales which can be filled out about the group members by the members themselves, their co-participants in the discussion, or nonparticipant observers. Obviously, the analysis of actual group behaviors would be the most desirable approach.[3] Unfortunately, that technique tends to be impractical with many groups. The technique most often employed utilizes paper-and-pencil scales.

Bales has provided three different, though parallel, 26-item scales for the assessment of oneself or one's fellow members. Called the Interpersonal Rating Forms (IRF), the three scales can be used to locate a given member in one of the twenty-seven locations of the three-dimensional

space depicted in Figure 1. The scales have been widely reprinted and are often employed as a diagnostic aid in the evaluation of task groups.[4]

Reliability and validity data for the IRF are, at best, meager. The scales were based upon a factor analysis of 300 variables collected from sixty Harvard undergraduates who met in twelve groups of five for a series of five two-hour meetings. Additional reliability and validity data could not be found. Bales himself has indicated the need for a more thorough analysis:

> It should be recognized that sixty subjects in twelve groups is a very small number for such a mountain of data analysis and so many hypotheses. No claims are made for the reliability or representativeness of the findings. These problems must be dealt with in the future. The present study, for all its complication, is only exploratory. Its virtue, I hope, is that it makes a major attack on the problem of synthesis of many variables that are so often treated in relative isolation.[5]

The present study, therefore, investigated the reliability and construct validity of Bales' Interpersonal Rating Forms.

METHOD

Subjects

Two-hundred-sixty-six volunteer subjects were obtained from those students enrolled in various sections of an undergraduate communication course. The students had recently completed a unit in group decision making.

Procedure

Subjects were administered a Likert-type self-report questionnaire in five-choice response format. The questionnaires contained all twenty-six items from each of Bales' three Interpersonal Rating Forms, numbered consecutively. The questionnaires, therefore, contained seventy-eight items, and they were administered in the classrooms of regularly scheduled courses.

The questionnaires differed from Bales' original rating forms in two ways. First, the response format was expanded from three choices (yes, ?, no) to five choices (YES, yes, ?, no, NO) in order to increase response variability and measurement precision. Second, the items were modified to clearly emphasize that self-evaluations should be made. Although Bales says that the questionnaires could be used to evaluate either oneself or others, the original items were worded to emphasize that another group member was being evaluated. This was changed for the present study. For example, Item 4 originally was worded: "Does he (or she) assume responsibility for task leadership?" This item was rewritten as: "Do you assume responsibility for task leadership?"

Scoring

Items were keyed according to the directional indicators provided by Bales.[6] As Table 1 indicates, some items tap only one direction (e.g., question 1, coded YES=U); others call for two directions (e.g., question 2, coded YES=UP); still others call for three directions (e.g., question 3, coded YES=UPF). The individual letters represent the names of "directions" within the system. A complete set of up to three such directional indicators depict locations within the three-dimensional model of Figure 1. (The central position in the spatial model has no directional indicators, nor are there items keyed to this location. Bales calls this central quadrant a "balanced average" of the three dimensions.)

(Table 1 about here)

To investigate reliability, the items tapping a given dimensional subscale were scored using a 1-5 format to weight each response appropriately. To investigate the factor structure of the Interpersonal Rating Forms, all items were scaled from YES=5 to NO=1.

RESULTS

Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed for each dimension within each of the three forms. As Table 2 indicates, reliability coefficients for the 18-item subscales were weak, ranging from .000 to .615 and averaging .399.

The results of the reliability assessment indicate that the three forms of the IRF are not reliable measuring instruments. The reported coefficients are low and probably inflated, since a typical item has more than one directional indicator and consequently is assessed in more than one subscale.

(Table 2 about here)

Construct Validity

Construct validity was assessed by examining the factor structure of the IRF. Bales' theory predicts that the IRF should contain three orthogonal factors. The directional indicators for the individual items predict that the items should load on the three factors in the manner depicted in Table 3.

A principle components factor analysis was conducted on the seventy-eight items. Application of the "eigenvalues equal one" criterion yielded twenty-four factors. The Scree test[7] suggested that the first twelve factors were significant. An orthogonal solution was achieved through Varimax rotation of the twelve factors.[8]

(Table 3 about here)

Items in Factor 1 deal with psychological dysfunctions ("depressed," "signs of tension and passive resistance"). Factor 2 measures verbal submissiveness ("rate of participation is low"). Factor 3 refers to positive affect ("able to give affection," "seems friendly"). Factor 4 measures conventional, conforming behaviors ("stand for conservative ideas and beliefs," "seem acceptant of authority"). Factor 5 deals with ascendant and entertaining behaviors ("receive a lot of laughter," "think of yourself as entertaining") and corresponds to Bales' description of the social-emotional leader. Factor 6 is very weakly represented, with no items loading above .384. The factor seems to tap Bales' downward-forward direction ("plows persistently ahead"). Factor 7 measures task leadership ("seems dominating," "rated highly on leadership").

The remaining factors are all weakly represented. Factor 8 has no items with loadings above .393. It seems similar to Factor 4 ("emphasize moderation and value-determined restraint"). Factor 9 has only one item loading above .365 ("rate of receiving disagreement high"). Factor 10 has only one strong item ("prone to feel admiration for others"). Factor 11 is similar to Factor 3 ("others feel liking for you"). Items in Factor 12 seem counteractive to value control ("sees others as too accepting of authority"). All twelve factors account for only 47.8% of the total test variance (see Table 4).

(Table 4 about here)

The results of the factor analysis are bleak. The factor structure of the IRF bears little resemblance to the theoretical structure predicted by Bales. The IRF is measuring something, however weakly. The average intercorrelation between parallel subscales was .413 (up-down = .525; positive-negative = .463; forward-backward = .254), while the average intercorrelation between non-parallel subscales was .111.

To provide a clearer picture of the dimensions tapped by the IRF, a subset of 23 items was selected for re-analysis. Included items were those which had a primary loading on the rotated factor matrix above .450 and which had low secondary loadings on the remaining factors. All items tapping a given factor were eliminated unless three or more items had loadings on the given factor above .450. Factors 1 through 7, excluding Factor 6, were represented. Table 5 provides the rotated factor matrix for these 23 items.

The factor analysis provided six factors. As expected, the items comprising the six factors are identical to those of the 78-item factor analysis, although the order of the factors has been rearranged. Items in Factor 1 measure task leadership. Factor 2 taps verbal submissiveness. Factor 3 deals with negative social-emotional qualities and psychological dysfunctions. Factor 4 measures positive social-emotional qualities. Factor 5 refers to positive affect. Items in Factor 6 measure conformity and conservatism. Together, the six factors account for 58.8% of the total variance for the 23 items.

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the items comprising the six factors are reported in Table 6. Despite their brevity, the first four factors all have internal consistency measures above .700.

(Tables 5 and 6 about here)

Discussion

The present study notes serious shortcomings of the IRF as a measuring instrument. The subscales are neither reliable nor valid.

A look at the directional indicators for the items (Table 1) and the hypothesized factor structure (Table 3) suggests the reason for such poor reliability and validity. Each form of the IRF has items representing all 26 of the positions in the spatial model. Only two of the 18 items in every subscale are designed to be "pure" representatives of the dimension tapped by that subscale. The remaining 16 items are more complex; eight items measure one additional dimension, and eight other items measure all three dimensions. Despite these obvious differences in the "purity" of the items, all items are weighted equally in the calculation of the directional indicators for a given subject. The scoring procedure, therefore, overemphasizes items which are known a priori to weakly represent a given dimension.

Perhaps one could improve the reliability of the IRF by weighting each item in some appropriate way. Unfortunately, such a procedure would do little to improve the scale's construct validity. A better alternative would be to create unidimensional subscales which reliably measure each of the component directions. One's location in the "group space" could then be determined by scores on the subscales. The items reported in Table 5 may be useful in research directed toward development of reliable and valid subscales.

Given the lack of fit between the IRF and Bales' theory, however, one must ask if the obtained results suggest that the theory itself ought to

be modified. Though the evidence supporting the multidimensionality of interpersonal behaviors is quite strong, there is some controversy about the appropriate number of dimensions. Some researchers, like Bales, suggest a three-dimensional "space" for classifying interpersonal behavior.[9] Others have described a two-dimensional equivalent for non-task groups,[10] or have suggested that a fourth dimension be added to the first three.[11] The obtained factor structure seems to better approximate Hare's four-dimensional structure than Bales' three-dimensional structure. Hare argued that Bales' forward-backward dimension ought to be subdivided into two separate components: serious versus expressive, which compares task-oriented to social-emotional oriented behaviors; and conforming versus nonconforming, which assesses the degree of adherence to traditional social norms. Table 7 provides Hare's four-dimensional typology.[12]

(Table 7 about here)

The six factors reported in Table 5 correspond fairly closely to six of the eight poles of Hare's four "bipolar" dimensions. The factors correspond, respectively, to Hare's dominant, submissive, negative, expressive, positive, and conforming poles. Missing are factors which tap the serious and nonconforming poles. Unfortunately, these results also question the assumption of dimensional bipolarity. The data suggest, for example, that subjects do not consider "positive" behaviors and "negative" behaviors to be psychologically or arithmetically opposite, since two separate factors emerged with minimal cross-loadings between factors.

A test of the adequacy of Bales' operationalizations tests the theory itself, as the operationalizations provide the only empirical access to the theory's constructs. A disconfirmation of the theory's operationalizations, therefore, provides evidence that the theory itself may be vague or opaque.[13] Although the IRF is not the only operationalization of Bales' dimensions of interpersonal behavior, it nevertheless forms an important component in his conceptual scheme. Additional studies are needed to test Bales' predictions about actual behavioral operationalizations of his three-dimensional scheme.

NOTES

[1] Robert F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1949); Robert F. Bales, Personality and Interpersonal Behavior (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970); Robert F. Bales, A Manual for the Case Study of Groups (Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University, 1975); Robert F. Bales and Stephen P. Cohen, Systematic Multiple Level Observation of Groups (SYMLOG) (Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University, 1975).

[2] Arthur S. Couch, "Psychological Determinants of Interpersonal Behavior," Diss., Harvard University, 1960.

[3] Robert F. Bales and A. Paul Hare, "Diagnostic Use of the Interaction Profile," Journal of Social Psychology, 67 (1965), pp.239-258.

[4] See, for example, Ronald L. Applbaum, Fundamentals of Group Discussion (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1976).

[5] Bales, Personality, p.391.

[6] Bales, Personality, p.7.

[7] Raymond B. Cattell, "The Scree Test for the Number of Factors," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 1 (1966), pp.245-276; Raymond B. Cattell and S. Vogelmann, "A Comprehensive Trial of the Scree and KG Criteria for Determining the Number of Factors," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 12

(1977), pp.289-325. There is some controversy about the appropriate procedure to determine the "correct" number of factors. The Scree test appears to be reasonably accurate. See: A. Ralph Hakstian and Victor J. Muller, "Some Notes on the Number of Factors Problem," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 8 (1973), pp.461-475; Donald J. Veldman, "Simple Structure and the Number of Factors Problem," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 9 (1974), pp.191-200.

[8] Henry F. Kaiser, "The Varimax Criterion for Analytic Rotation in Factor Analysis," Psychometrika, 23 (1958), pp.187-200.

[9] Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci and Percy H. Tannenbaum, The Measurement of Meaning (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957); William C. Schutz, FIRO: A Three-Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960).

[10] Timothy Leary, Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality (New York: Ronald Press, 1957).

[11] A. Paul Hare, "Four Dimensions of Interpersonal Behavior," Psychological Reports, 30 (1972), pp.499-512.

[12] Hare, p.511.

[13] Charles W. Lachenmeyer, The Language of Sociology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). For a general discussion of constructs

and operational definitions, consult standard methodology texts such as: Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, Second Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), Chapter 3.

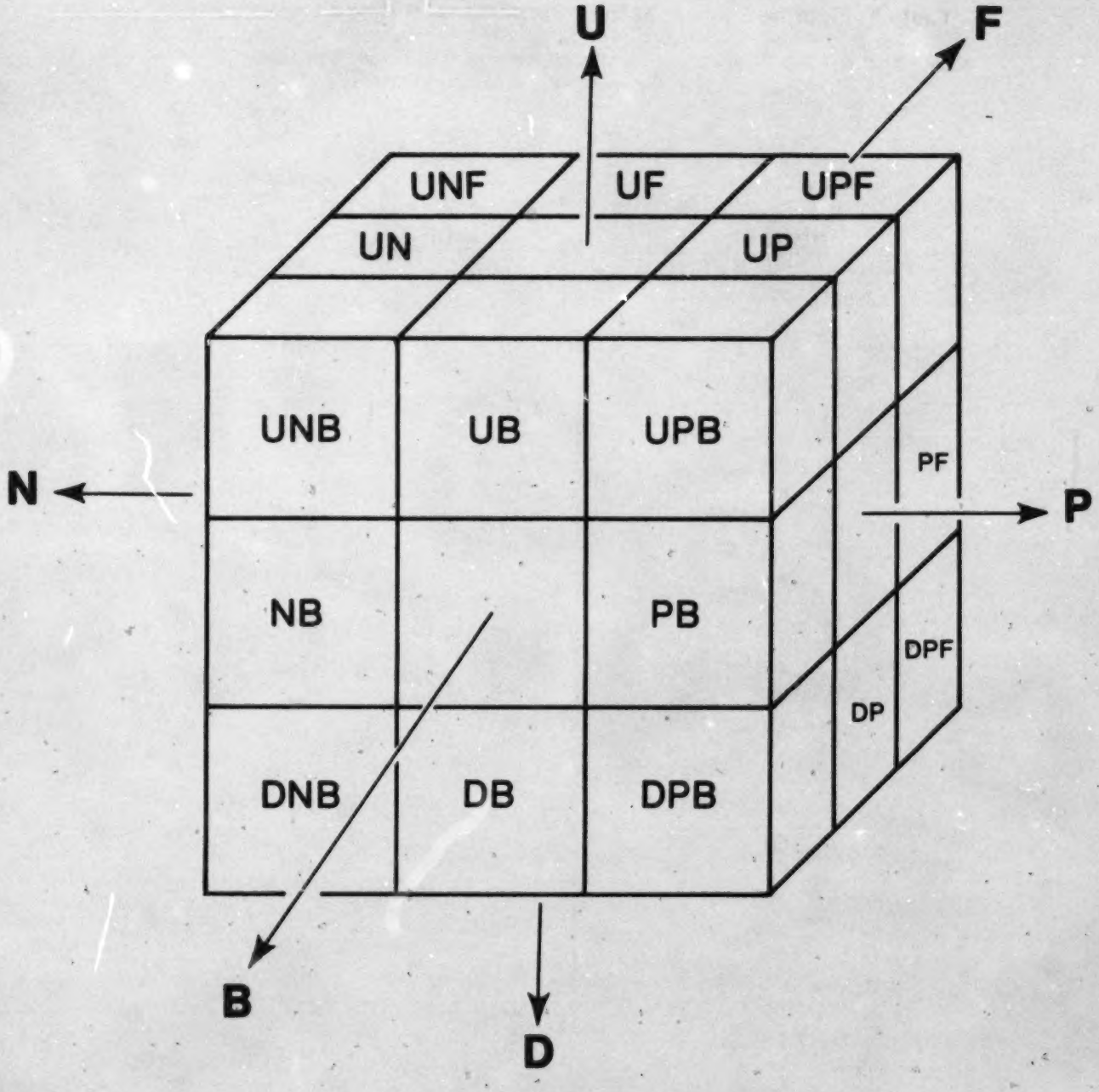

Figure 1: Bales' Three-Dimensional Model of Group Space

KEY: The named reference directions are: UP (U), Down (D), Positive (P), Negative (N), Forward (F), Backward (B).

Table 1: Scoring Key for Bales' Interpersonal Rating Forms.

KEY: The named reference directions are: Up (U), Down (D), Positive (P), Negative (N), Forward (F), and Backward (B).

ITEM NUMBER			DIRECTIONAL INDICATOR	
Form A	Form B	Form C	YES	NO
1	27	53	U	D
2	28	54	UP	DN
3	29	55	UPF	DNB
4	30	56	UF	DB
5	31	57	UNF	DPB
6	32	58	UN	DP
7	33	59	UNB	DPF
8	34	60	UB	DF
9	35	61	UPB	DNF
10	36	62	P	N
11	37	63	PF	NB
12	38	64	F	B
13	39	65	NF	PB
14	40	66	N	P
15	41	67	NB	PF
16	42	68	B	F
17	43	69	PB	NF
18	44	70	DP	UN
19	45	71	DPF	UNB
20	46	72	DF	UB
21	47	73	DNF	UPB
22	48	74	DN	UP
23	49	75	DNB	UPF
24	50	76	DB	UF
25	51	77	DPB	UNF
26	52	78	D	U

Table 2: Reliability Coefficients for IRF Dimensions.

Form	Dimension	Number of Items	Reliability
A	Up-Down	18	.564
A	Positive-Negative	18	.441
A	Forward-Backward	18	.000
B	Up-Down	18	.512
B	Positive-Negative	18	.615
B	Forward-Backward	18	.292
C	Up-Down	18	.436
C	Positive-Negative	18	.477
C	Forward-Backward	18	.258

Table 3: Hypothesized Factor Structure of the IRF

Key: + positive loading on the factor
0 no loading on the factor
– negative loading on the factor

Items			Up-Down	Positive-Negative	Forward-Backward
Form A	Form B	Form C	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	27	53	1.0	0	0
2	28	54	+	+	0
3	29	55	+	+	+
4	30	56	+	0	+
5	31	57	+	–	+
6	32	58	+	–	0
7	33	59	+	–	–
8	34	60	+	0	–
9	35	61	+	+	–
10	36	62	0	1.0	0
11	37	63	0	+	+
12	38	64	0	0	1.0
13	39	65	0	–	+
14	40	66	0	–1.0	0
15	41	67	0	–	–
16	42	68	0	0	–1.0
17	43	69	0	+	–
18	44	70	–	+	0
19	45	71	–	+	+
20	46	72	–	0	+
21	47	73	–	–	+
22	48	74	–	–	0
23	49	75	–	–	–
24	50	76	–	0	–
25	51	77	–	+	–
26	52	78	–1.0	0	0

Table 4: Rotated Factor Matrix of the IRF (Combined Forms)

Note: Only loadings above .300 are reported.

ITEM	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9	Factor 10	Factor 11	Factor 12
1		−.315										
2		−.508										
3						.344						
4		−.335					.561					
5							.442					.315
6							.756					
7												.410
8					.649							
9			.350		.350						.319	
10												
11											.437	
12				.660								
13											.346	
14											.454	
15												
16				−.456								
17											.476	
18			.319									
19			.412								.393	
20	.429		−.323				−.328					
21												
22	.439											
23												
24												
25												
26	.495											
27		−.548					.329					
28							.385					
29						.316						
30		−.431					.357					
31									.619			
32	.398		−.372									
33					.686							
34					.370		.303					
35			.593									
36			.476								.463	
37			−.357				.367		.364			
38											.347	
39								.393				
40	.329		−.390								−.301	
41			−.486									
42	.559			.385								
43										−.365		
44	−.310										.438	
45		.332				.321						
46												
47												
48		.667										
49	.480											.383
50	.516											
51												
52		.609										
53												
54						.334						
55							.652					
56						.317						
57							.343	.337				
58								.360				
59							.652					
60					.615							
61											.316	
62										.433		
63										.550		
64							.337					
65	.354							.388				
66			−.355				.300					
67							−.441					
68				−.308								.476
69					.302							
70			.321									
71						.360						
72				.501								
73						.384						
74	.683											
75	.634											
76		.323									−.337	
77												
78		.689										
Eigenvalues	9.32	6.08	4.12	2.89	2.56	2.32	1.91	1.81	1.69	1.58	1.55	1.50
% of Total Variance	12.0	7.8	5.3	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.0	1.9
% of Factor Variance	29.2	19.3	11.7	7.6	6.5	6.7	4.3	3.9	3.5	3.2	3.0	3.0

Table 5: Rotated Factor Matrix of Best Items

	ITEM	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	h^2
6	Seem dominating	**.737**	−.061	.097	.141	−.173	−.082	.491
55	Rated highly on leadership	**.729**	−.150	−.253	.104	.108	.113	.588
59	Others rate you high on domination	**.665**	−.197	.068	.126	−.068	.033	.486
4	Assume responsibility for task leadership	**.662**	−.238	−.167	.043	.206	.017	.559
48	Only participate when others ask for your opinion	−.137	**.725**	.171	.034	.075	.001	.442
78	Rate of participation generally very low	−.209	**.636**	.231	−.102	−.114	−.024	.497
52	Confine participation to only giving information when asked	−.119	**.612**	.235	.048	−.169	.087	.463
27	Rate of participation generally high	.335	**−.533**	−.201	.168	.178	.057	.508
2	Personally involved in group	.088	**−.487**	−.133	.083	.299	.120	.330
75	Believe that others dislike you	−.005	.128	**.678**	−.013	−.141	.069	.430
74	Somewhat depressed	.004	.144	**.643**	.027	.010	.006	.350
49	Preoccupied with feelings of dislike for others	.040	.160	**.508**	.093	−.247	−.036	.363
50	Signs of tension and passive resistance	−.077	.159	**.497**	−.034	−.025	−.129	.319
26	Devaluate yourself	−.115	.112	**.495**	.068	−.055	.075	.279
33	Receive a lot of laughter	.036	−.021	−.042	**.735**	.020	−.016	.353
60	Make many jokes or show many fantasies	.172	−.092	.226	**.644**	−.084	−.076	.401
8	Think of yourself as entertaining	.162	−.014	.000	**.596**	.199	.000	.347
35	Able to give a lot of affection	.005	−.085	−.003	.042	**.597**	−.011	.294
36	Seem friendly	.041	−.077	−.181	.172	**.593**	.015	.344
41	Pessimistic about group ideals	.063	.222	.254	.164	**−.418**	−.004	.306
12	Stand for conservative ideas and beliefs of the group	.113	.053	.032	−.040	−.160	**.625**	.247
16	Reject religious beliefs generally	−.028	.134	−.019	.121	−.074	**−.521**	.235
72	Acceptant of authority	−.063	.033	−.033	.066	.059	**.461**	.173
Eigenvalues		4.71	2.76	1.81	1.59	1.41	1.24	
Percent of Total Variance		20.5	12.0	7.9	6.9	6.1	5.4	
Percent of Factor Variance		41.0	22.0	12.5	9.2	8.3	7.1	

Table 6: Reliability Coefficients for Best Items.

Factor	Items*	Reliability
1	6,55,59,4	.806
2	48,78,52,27,2	.797
3	75,74,49,50,26	.718
4	33,60,8	.700
5	35,36,41	.547
6	12,16,72	.523

Bold items indicate reverse loadings.

Table 7: Hare's Four Dimensions of Interpersonal Behavior

I Dominant vs. Submissive

Dominant:	Assuming autocratic control or seeking status in the group by making direct suggestions or by giving opinions which serve to guide group activity. (Also measured by total talking rate.)
Submissive:	Showing dependence by asking for help, showing anxiety, shame and guilt, or frustration, laughing at the jokes of a dominant person.

II Positive vs. Negative

Positive:	Seeming friendly by showing affection, agreement, or by asking for information or opinion in an encouraging way.
Negative:	Seeming unfriendly by disagreeing, showing antagonism, or diffuse aggression.

III Serious vs. Expressive:

Serious:	Giving information or opinions which indicate serious involvement in the task. Routine agreement.
Expressive:	Giving support to others regardless of task performance or showing tension release through joking or other evidence of flight from the task.

IV Conforming vs. Nonconforming:

Conforming:	Seeking to be guided by the group norms by asking for information or suggestions. Making jokes or dramatic statements which reveal the basic nature of the group.
Nonconforming:	Showing tension which indicates withdrawal from the field. Describing fantasies which reveal individual goals rather than group goals. Resisting pressure to conform.